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# GNOSTICISM AND THE NEW TESTAMENT*

BY

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When we consider the problem of Gnosticism and Christianity, we must take into account certain facts about the history of the Church.

Paul's opponents in Palestine did not disappear without leaving any trace. Their views were inherited and developed by a group of Jewish Christians existing somewhere in Syria; it was this group who were largely responsible for the views expressed in the Pseudo-Clementine writings. It is, of course, exceedingly difficult to assess just to what extent the older views are present in these later writings. But there is no doubt that some continuity does exist. Attempts to deny this continuity or to explain it away by citing parallels from Gnosticism should be dismissed as apologetics. The Pseudo-Clementine writings may be somewhat fantastic, but certainly are not gnostic. They are moreover valuable to the historian of the Church, both for the concept which we find there of Jesus as the promised prophet and because they show us that animosity towards Paul continued to persist in certain Jewish Christian quarters.

Nor should we assume that the Christian community of Jerusalem – that recognized Paul, but did not accept his views on the Law – vanished into the air after 70, or even after 135 A.D. If the Acts of the Apostles say nothing about the Christian mission to Egypt or Eastern Syria and Mesopotamia, we must not conclude that nothing of the kind existed. Egypt is very near to Palestine; consequently there were many Jews living in Alexandria. So it is possible that Jewish Christians came to Alexandria at a very early date to preach the Messiah, especially to their compatriots. In any case Jewish Christians must have lived there before 200 A.D., because both Clement of Alexandria and Origen quote with some respect from their Gospel, the *Gospel According to the Hebrews*.

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Relations between Palestine and Edessa are better substantiated. Tradition tells us that a certain Addai, a name abbreviated from the Hebrew 'Adonya', was sent from Jerusalem to Edessa to preach the Gospel and was very well received there by the local Jews. Burkitt and Vööbus agree that there must be some truth in this story. As a matter of fact, we must consider the Aramaic-speaking Christendom of Palestine and Syria as a special unit with its own traditions, strongly influenced by its Jewish surroundings and not very interested in the ontological interpretation of Christianity which developed on Greek soil. This isolation explains, for example, why the concept of the Holy Ghost as a mother, a concept well attested in the Jewish Christian Gospel tradition and quite understandable in a religion of Semitic language, continued to persist everywhere in Syria and can even be found in the fourth-century Syrian mystic Makarios.

All this, of course, has nothing to do with Gnosticism. It is against this background, however, that we must see the Gospel tradition in the *Gospel of Thomas*, which for several reasons should be located in the Christian community of Edessa and dated about the year 140 A.D. This collection of sayings contains evidence of a Gospel tradition transmitted in a Jewish Christian milieu. In fact, one saying is even based upon a quotation from the *Gospel According to the Hebrews* (1. 2). In logion 12, James is seen as the primate of the whole Church, a view also attested by the Pseudo-Clementine writings (*Rec.* 1. 43); this reflects the precedence of James in the primitive community, of which Paul also gives witness when, in *Galatians* 2. 9, he puts James before Peter. If the Western Text gives the names in the opposite order and thus shows that at a very early date somebody in Rome may have had a different opinion, this only proves that the original wording was no mere coincidence. But the *Gospel of Thomas* also shows that it was Jewish rather than Gentile Christians who brought Christianity to Eastern Syria. Its author often uses, and even inserts into his sources, the word 'monachos' in the sense of 'bachelor', thereby showing that this was a technical term in his milieu. As a matter of fact, this word, of central importance in the *Gospel of Thomas*, has until now not been found in any known gnostic writing unless one wants to claim that the *Gospel of Thomas* is such, and so its presence is certainly no evidence for this text being gnostic. In fact its use here tends

to show that the *Gospel of Thomas* is not gnostic at all. For the word 'monachos', here, as in the Bible translation of the Jewish Christian Symmachus, seems to be the translation of the Hebrew 'jaḥid', which is invested with the same meaning of 'bachelor' in some rabbinic passages. The concept continued to exist in Syrian asceticism, expressed by the technical term 'iḥidaja', which conveys exactly the same idea.

We find the same relation between Jewish Christianity and Syrian asceticism in logion 42, "become passers-by." Some gnosticizing interpreters of the *Gospel of Thomas* have translated it, "come into being as you pass away." Consideration of the Greek, Coptic, and Hebrew languages show that this translation, while impressive, is incomprehensible and faulty. Joachim Jeremias has pointed out that 'passer-by' is a literal translation of the Hebrew word 'obēr', which means 'wanderer', 'wandering teacher'. The logion says, "become wanderers." Obedient to this commandment the Syrian ascetics kept wandering until the fourth century and even later.

It would seem that this ascetic mood of the Jewish Christians is responsible for the distortion of the Parable of the Invitations, as found in the *Gospel of Thomas*, logion 64. Following the example of the Old Testament prophets Zephania (1. 11) and Zecharia (14. 21) this writing shows a certain animosity towards commerce and business. "Tradesmen and merchants shall not enter the seats (lit. places) of my Father." But exactly the same application and interpretation of the Parable is to be found in Aphraates (Parisot, p. 249–250: *qui adsumit iugum sanctorum, negotiationem a se removeat*). Vööbus was certainly right when he pointed out that Syrian asceticism and Christian asceticism in general had a Jewish Christian background. A gnosticizing, arbitrary, and unhistorical interpretation of the *Gospel of Thomas* obscures this insight into the history of the early Church.

Historians of the early Church have recently stressed the importance of Encratism and the fact that its roots lay in primitive Christianity. These two realizations have a direct bearing upon the much debated problem of Gnosticism and Christianity. Much would be gained for our study of the New Testament if it were established once and for all that Encratism is not the same as Gnosticism. Henry Chadwick, in an article for *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, has shown that Christianity has been accompanied by

Encratism since the former's very beginning. Perhaps it was present in Corinth, where Paul exhorted the Encratites not to give up marriage in the spiritual overrating of their all too human frames. Certainly it is there too in the Pastoral Letters, where Jewish Encratites proclaim that the resurrection has already taken place and that marriage should be abolished. Later, Encratism remained a current within the Catholic Church until finally, in some quarters of the Western Church, the Encratites were declared heretics and expelled. I must add that in Syria the Encratites in fact remained within the Church much longer. Tatian was not considered a heretic there; on the contrary his Gospel harmony, which contained Encratitic corrections, was accepted for use in the Church. The *Acts of Thomas*, written about 225 A.D. in Edessa, reflects the mainstream of Syrian Christianity when it proclaims divorce as the essential Christian teaching. The Syrian *Liber Graduum*, rightly considered by its editor Kmosko to be Encratitic, shows no evidence that it was written outside the Church. The fourth-century Syrian mystic Makarios (38. 1) identified the Church with its unmarried ascetics – a characteristic view for Encratitic doctrine. But although his views are certainly in tune with the specific teachings of the Syrian Messalians, we cannot prove that in his lifetime Messalianism led a heterodox existence outside the Church. Our sources show rather that their expulsion took place only towards the end of the fourth century. Messalianism then was probably a revival of a very old indigenous spirituality, which had existed in Syria for many centuries.

Encratism seems to have differed from Catholicism mainly in that it prescribed celibacy, whereas the Western Church in general only preferred it. Celibacy was for the Encratites a requirement for baptism. According to our sources they considered marriage to be fornication and corruption; from this it followed that everyone who had not left his father and his mother was to be considered the son of a prostitute. Moreover, birth was considered to be deplorable, because it inevitably led to death.

Our main source for the history of Encratism, the third book of Clement of Alexandria's *Stromateis*, reveals a more sophisticated and profound interpretation of the Christian faith and gives us reason to suppose that a certain continuity between the New Testament and the early Church can also be found to exist in the case of Encratism.

In the *Stromateis*, marriage is considered in its eschatological perspective. Jesus had taught that in the eschatological era marriage would not exist any more (Mk. 12. 25 par.). But now eschatology has been realised. Christ has risen from the dead, the faithful participate in His resurrection, and therefore marriage should be abolished. It is possible that this reasoning also lies behind the words of the Encratites in 2 Tim. 2. 18, saying that the resurrection has already taken place.

Clement also transmits the pessimistic view of these Encratites on love and marriage; reproduction and generation only serve to nourish death. But the basis of their theology is biblical – they follow the Lord who was poor and unmarried. Redemption, moreover, is a deliverance from desire, because the Fall, according to their interpretation, was a Fall out of innocence into sexuality. The tree of knowledge from which man ate symbolized sexual intercourse. Jesus by his life and message delivered the Christian from this urge and drive for life.

When we have read and understood the views of the Encratites in the third book of the *Stromateis*, we clearly see that this is the real theology of the *Gospel of Thomas*. It teaches that

1) only those who are unmarried can be saved (1.75);
2) the resurrection has already taken place (1. 51);
3) marriage is fornication (1. 105);
4) the earthly mother produces children for death, but the heavenly Mother regenerates them for eternal life (1. 101);
5) before the Fall, man lived in a state of innocence, where the differentiation between the sexes had not yet taken place (1. 37, 1. 11). When man returns to the sexual innocence of the child, and only then, he regains Paradise (1. 22); he realises the original unity and identity with himself which he had lost.

All this is Encratitic and in accord with the information given by Clement of Alexandria concerning the Encratites. This proves that the *Gospel of Thomas* is Encratitic. The activity of Tatian in Eastern Syria and the Acts of Thomas attest to the existence of Encratites in the Syrian Church of Edessa. The *Gospel of Thomas* proves that they were already there about 140 A.D. Unlike Gnosticism the *Gospel of Thomas* does not teach an inferior demiurge,

docetism, the divine consubstantiality of the human Self, nor the mythical expression of self-experience – where is Achamoth, where Barbelo, where are the Aeons? Those who claim that the author of the *Gospel of Thomas* was a Gnostic must first prove that there were Gnostics in second-century Edessa and that the author of this writing was one of them. I know of no sources which contain such information. The adherents of the gnostic interpretation, moreover, must explain how the author could possibly say that the buried *corpse* could rise again (logion 5, Greek version) and that Jesus manifested himself, quite undocetically, in the *flesh* (1. 28, cf. Baruch 3. 38).

I think, on the contrary, that we can adduce a decisive argument to prove that the *Gospel of Thomas* is Syrian and Encratitic. Working quite independently of one another, Dom Baker and G. Quispel have recently established that the Syrian mystic Makarios knew and used the *Gospel of Thomas*. Makarios quotes one saying almost word for word, "The Kingdom of God is spread upon the earth and men do not see it (1. 113)." Furthermore, he makes many clear allusions to the *Gospel of Thomas* and there are also very many similarities in the two theologies. For both Makarios and the author of the *Gospel of Thomas* Christ is our Father and the Holy Spirit our Mother; man should be one, because God is one. Man originates in the heavenly Paradise and has fallen because he has tasted the bitterness of desire and has drunk the venom with which the serpent infected the fruit of knowledge. But now eschatology has been realised, the resurrection is already here, owing to Christ. Therefore man should dissolve his marriage, leave his wife and children, follow Christ and identify himself with Him, in order to regain Paradise here and now.

Nobody has ever said that Makarios was a Gnostic. Then neither is the *Gospel of Thomas*. We should envision this writing in its historical milieu and thus in its proper perspective, in order to discern its message. Encratism is not Gnosticism – not even the Encratism of the New Testament, which should be interpreted in the light of the available Encratitic sources, both Greek and Syrian (although they are of a somewhat later date).

With this in mind, we turn to the so-called *Hymn of the Pearl*, which occurs in the *Acts of Thomas* (ch. 108–113). This hymn is sometimes considered the key to the pre-Christian Iranian myth

of the Saved Saviour, which is supposed to lie behind the teaching of the New Testament, especially the Fourth Gospel. The poem tells us about a prince who as a child was living in the kingdom of his father. He is sent away from home with a 'load' ('phorton') of precious stones to fetch a pearl in Egypt. When he arrives there he clothes himself in the dress of the Egyptians and forgets about his mission. Then a letter is sent to him from home which reminds him of his task. He charms the serpent that guards the pearl, "the one pearl (line 12)", and he takes this pearl away and returns to his father. The robe which he had formerly worn is given back to him. In this he recognises his real nature. He invests himself with this robe and gives the pearl to his father.

There is no doubt that this hymn is Christian in origin. It is based upon the Parable of the Pearl, of which it is a poetical amplification and illustration. More especially it is based upon the version of this Parable contained in the *Gospel of Thomas* 1. 76. "The Kingdom of the Father is like the man, a merchant, who possessed merchandise ('phortion') and discovered a pearl. That merchant was prudent. He sold the merchandise, and bought 'the one pearl' for himself."

This parable must have existed outside the *Gospel of Thomas* in the Jewish Christian and Syrian Gospel traditions. In the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions* (3. 62) we also read that the merchant was 'sapiens' and that he bought '*unam* margaritam' ('the one pearl'). Likewise 'sapiens' is the reading of Ephrem Syrus and the *Life of Rabbula*. But the *Hymn of the Pearl*, too, has the variants 'phortion' and 'the one pearl' in common with the *Gospel of Thomas*. If the *Acts of Thomas* was written at Edessa about 225 A.D., this Christian hymn must have been composed sometime before 225 A.D. and after the introduction of Christianity into Edessa by Jewish Christians. Nor is there any doubt that its basic ideas are also to be found in the Syrian Makarios. For in Makarios as well, we find that man receives again the garment of glory that he had lost when the soul fell from its height and became the slave of the true Pharaoh (47. 6). Or again he likens Christians to the sons whom a father sent to a foreign country with drugs to soothe and kill the dragons that attack them (26. 24). Moreover in Makarios, Scripture is the letter, written by a king (30).

In this historical context the underlying idea of the *Hymn of*

*the Pearl* is revealed. The soul, born in the heavenly Paradise, must be reminded of its task in the body, so it can return to Paradise and receive the original garment of the Spirit. The concept of the pre-existence of the soul in Paradise, of Jewish origin and understandable in a Christian milieu so profoundly influenced by Judaism, persisted in Syria at least until the time of Makarios (25. 7). The *Hymn of the Pearl* is not gnostic at all, but rather an orthodox Christian hymn tinged with Judaistic colours.

Perhaps these conclusions will give us some second thoughts about the uncritical statements of Geo Widengren and others concerning the Iranian myth of the Saved Saviour. We are reminded of the sober criticism by Gershom Scholem in his great book, *Jewish Gnosticism*, where he writes:

> Theories that the origin of Gnosticism is to be found outside the scope of Judaism have been widely discussed. It is one of many marvels confronting the explorer in the field that scholars who have been looking far and wide to establish the source from which it all has come have been remarkably reluctant, or, rather, unwilling to allow the theory that gnostic tendencies may have developed in the very midst of Judaism itself, whether in its classical forms or on its heterodox and sectarian fringes. The more far-fetched the explanation, the better. The theories of Reitzenstein in particular, on the Iranian origin of Gnosticism, have had considerable influence for some time. Even when, on closer inspection, they have been found disappointing and highly speculative, they still linger on – if only in a somewhat emasculated form. One is often left wondering about the methods used in this approach; and one is no less amazed by the stupendous ignorance of Jewish sources that warps the conclusions and even the basic approach of some of the finest scholars. Since the appearance of the excellent collection of rabbinic source material in Strack-Billerbeck's Commentary on the New Testament, we have, furthermore, been vouchsafed a new kind of fake scholarship, one that feeds on this work and takes it for granted that what is not in Billerbeck is not in existence (pp. 1–2).

I think we must agree with Scholem. Gnosticism is not a late chapter of the history of Greek philosophy and therefore a Christian heresy, an acute Hellenization of the Christian religion. Nor is it a fossilized survival of old Iranian or even Indian religious concepts, and certainly it is not derived from a presupposed consistent Iranian myth of the Saved Saviour. It is rather a religion of its own, with its own phenomenological structure, characterized by the mythical expression of Self-experience through the revelation of the Word, or, in other words, by an awareness of a tragic split within the Deity itself. And as such it owes not a little to Judaism. When we try to discern the relations between Judaism and Gnosticism, the problem of Gnosticism and the New Testament may be seen in a new and illuminating perspective. For clarity's sake we shall distinguish between three milieus: first, circles at the outskirts of Judaism, namely in Samaria; second, the milieu of esoteric lore transmitted within the very heart of Palestinian Pharisaism; and third, certain baptist sects in Palestine which seem to have had some relation to the Jewish religion. The Hellenistic Judaism of Alexandria as represented by Philo, however, does not seem to have the same relevance to our subject.

The female counterpart of God is called 'Helen' in the Gnosis of Simon the Magician, 'Barbelo' in the *Apocryphon of John*, and 'Silence' in the Valentinian school. Perhaps all these names are important illustrations of the syncretistic character of Gnosticism. Helen was a goddess venerated everywhere in the Hellenistic world and in Samaria. Depth and Silence still have, as they had then, a mystical flavour. 'Barbelo' is more problematical, for its etymology is uncertain. In a magical papyrus which I acquired in Berlin in 1956, the name is found spelled Abrbelōth, together with Iō, Ialtabōth(?), El, Adonai, Gabriel(?), Souriel(?), Istrael, Mikael, Ouriel, ⟨B⟩ainchooooch and Abrasax. This sounds very Jewish, but does not necessarily prove that Abrbelōth was venerated in Jewish circles. In Greek magical papyri we find such forms as these: Barbariōth (Preisendanz, 1. 70), Barbar Adonai (1. 84), Brabēl (1. 102), Abraiaōth (1. 106), Abraal (1. 180), Abriēl (2. 43). It may be then that Abrbelōth is Hebrew and means perhaps: 'chabēr baal', 'companion of the Lord'. But etymologies of magical names are very uncertain. The only thing we can say is that Abrbelōth is related to Jewish-Hellenistic magic.

But the fact is, that these references and affiliations do not help us very much to discern the real issue of gnostic theology, which is to my mind the concept of the suffering God, the fallen God. Yet the gnostic sources are quite explicit in this respect. God suffers detriment to His soul (*Ev. Ver.* 41. 36); Iao redeems His soul (Iren. 1. 21. 3); Christ too redeems His soul (*Gospel of Philip*, 9). In a way this is also the basic idea of Manicheism: primordial Man, the Self of God, is overwhelmed by the powers of darkness and vanquished, until the call from above redeems him. God, in redeeming man, redeems Himself.

We must remove the Hellenistic accretions and rigorously examine the gnostic conception against its Jewish background, to understand what this means and what was happening in the transition from Judaism to Gnosticism. The female counterpart of the Godhead in Gnosticism is the Wisdom of Judaism, the more or less personified 'Choḳma' of Proverbs 9. 1, and of the Wisdom of Solomon, who according to Jewish teaching was instrumental in creating the world; and who, according to some versions of the story, descended from heaven to dwell among man, but was not accepted and so returned to her abode in heaven.

It would seem that in the Gnosis of Simon the Magician, Wisdom herself fell, that is to say the Fall is a split within the Deity. It is true that, according to one report, Wisdom herself remained completely unknown to the Rulers of this world, and only her image was overpowered by the lower powers (Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions* 2. 12). This then would mean that already at a very early date there existed among Samaritans (heterodox Jews) the concept of a double Wisdom. In any case, that is what we find in the *Apocryphon of John*. There Barbelo, the female counterpart of God, is called the 'first idea', a Stoic expression equally attributed to Simon's Helen, and understandable as a title of Wisdom; but the last of the aeons, who falls because of her lascivity, is called Sophia. And it would seem that this is a complication of the more simple concept, that Wisdom herself falls. The Valentinian system, as conceived by Ptolemaeus, is still further differentiated. There Sigē, the mother of the Pleroma, is distinguished from the thirtieth aeon Sophia, who falls because of her desire to understand God and then brings forth a lower Wisdom who is expelled from the Pleroma. But that we have here a far echo of Jewish Wisdom

speculations is proved by the fact that this female is called Achamoth, the Jewish Chokma (Iren. 1. 4. 1).

Once again we must turn to syncretism and astrology to find some explanation for the gnostic demiurge. In the *Apocryphon of John*, now available in its three Coptic versions edited by M. Krause and in a good English translation by Sören Giversen, we read that this demiurge, Ialdabaoth, has the aspect of a lion and a serpent. Evidently he is a monstrous figure with the head of a lion and the body of a serpent, like Chnoubis or Abrasax on magical amulets. More helpful is the information that Ialdabaoth has been borrowed from magic and represents the planet *Saturnus* (Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6. 33). Ialdabaoth, says the *Apocryphon of John*, had eyes like burning lightning that flashed. He is the god who brings about Heimarmene. All this fits in very well with astrological lore. Saturn, the highest planet with the most malignant influence, is represented in Africa as Baal Hammon with the head of a lion, and Arnobius speaks about him as the lion-headed Frugifer (*Adv. Gentes* 6. 10). Saturnus as Kronos and therefore Chronos ('time') is described by Plutarch (*de Iside* 44) as the creator of the world, because Time in its course brings forth everything. Saturnus is also the god of lightning. He is related to the monstrous figure in the Mithraic mysteries with the head of a lion and covered by snakes, who symbolizes Time and Fate. And certainly it is characteristic of Gnosticism to abhor and reject time and history. "This archon who was weak had three names: the first name is Ialdabaoth; the second is Saklas; the third is Sammaēl. But he was ungodly in his ignorance which is in him for he said: I am God and there is no other God but me (*Apoc. Joh.* 59. 15–20)." Ialdabaoth is Aramaic for 'Son of Chaos', an etymology which has long been suspected, and one which does not shed much light on our problem. Sammaēl means 'the blind one' and is a name of the devil in Jewish sources. This shows that the demiurge in the *Apocryphon of John* was identified with the devil who in certain passages of the New Testament is conceived of as the Ruler of this world, or even the God of this world.

Still more illuminating is the etymology of Saklas. 'Sakla' is Aramaic for 'fool'. This lends an Aramaic colour to the story and reveals the basic idea of the writing. The *Apocryphon of John* dramatically describes the persistent struggle between Ialdabaoth

and Barbelo, or some related female figure, whom he does not know. But if 'sakla' means 'fool', this means (in less mythological and more abstract terms) that the conflict between hidden wisdom and worldly folly is a persistent theme in history.

The original and spirital dualism of the *Apocryphon of John* is not, in the last analysis, a dualism of good and evil in the world, as in Manicheism, but of the Divine and the world. But at this point, the learned Gnostics Basilides and Valentinus follow a different course. They consider the demiurge to be an ignorant tool of a higher purpose. I think theirs is a conscious modification. It would seem to me that the original form of the myth contained in the *Apocryphon of John* is more primitive and archaic than the profound and learned elaborations of Basilides and Valentinus. If we accept this as a working hypothesis, we may discern how much Basilides and Valentinus contributed of their own account, and how each in his own way Hellenized and Christianized an earlier Gnosis of a much more mythological character, and showing a relative absence of Christian elements and the strong influence of a Jewish milieu. Basilides had a speculative mind, Valentinus was enthusiastic and poetical, but they did not create out of nothing. They developed an already existing gnostic myth, which at least must have been similar to the teaching of the *Apocryphon of John*. Then we can discern that they radically changed a primitive dualism into a much more monistic setting.

Basilides was perhaps not as original or as bold as he seemed to be when he started his system with an impressive statement about the "non-existent God". In the *Apocryphon of John* we find a similar negative theology. It might be, then, that this was the traditional way of starting a gnostic system. What is really new is that Basilides replaced emanation and fall, with creation and evolution; he conceived of Christ as the exclusive, central source of revelation, whereas the *Apocryphon* seems to teach several interventions by Barbelo. The Ruler of this world is not described as a hostile monster: he serves the hidden purpose of God and is instrumental in its fulfilment. But he originates from chaos and thus reminds us of Ialdabaoth, which seems to mean 'Son of Chaos'. He is called Abrasax and so recalls the well-known figure of the magic gems with the head of a cock, the tail of a serpent and a whip in his hand. Most characteristically, this highest Ruler of the

world does not know that there is a God above him. This theme seems to have been taken from an already existing gnostic system.

Valentinus appears to have followed the version in the *Apocryphon of John* more closely. It is said in a Valentinian source that Sophia suffered her passion apart from the embrace of her consort (Iren. 1. 2. 12); this feature also plays an important and detailed role in the newly published *Apocryphon* (135. 30 Krause). Moreover, in certain Valentinian sources, she prays, and the aeons intercede for her (Hipp. 6. 31). When in 1947, a reconstruction of the original doctrine of Valentinus was published, this was supposed to have been the teaching of the gnostic teacher himself, though no document from his school had exactly preserved this sequel of events. It was moreover suggested that the scheme of the myth was borrowed from some already existing oriental gnosticizing sects (*Vig. Christ.* 1 (1947), 43–73). It is gratifying to find so many years later something rather similar in the *Apocryphon of John* (61. 35), "she repented with much weeping, and the whole Pleroma heard the prayer of her repentance and praised the invisible, virginal spirit for her sake." This seems to prove that Valentinus must have known this or a similar writing.

Therefore when we find in a Valentinian document that the demiurge is called 'foolish', 'mōros' (Hipp. *Ref.* 6. 33. 1; 6. 34. 8), like 'Sakla' in the *Apocryphon of John*, we must assume that it is a traditional motif taken from an earlier Gnosis. For in the *Apocryphon* 'fool' has a very special, Jewish meaning. A fool is a man who says in his heart that there is no God. But that is exactly what the Ruler of this world is thought to say. Therefore he is 'foolish'; God and his Wisdom are hidden from him.

This concept, that the Wisdom of God is a hidden Wisdom, seems to be of Jewish origin. It is found already in Job 28. 12 ff. An adherent of Simon Magus seems to have taught that Divine Wisdom was completely unknown to the Rulers of this world (Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitiones* 2. 12: *ipsam vero ut est penitus ignorarunt*). The theme of the foolish Ruler of the world seems to be traditional in Gnosticism and seems to be derived from a Jewish milieu.

This would explain its curious similarity to some views held by St. Paul. The view that Wisdom has fallen is absent from the New Testament. Therefore, when we find in the Synoptic Gospels (as

in Matthew 11. 28) that Jesus speaks as the embodiment of Wisdom, we should not explain it in terms of a gnostic influence, but rather explain it in terms of a common Jewish background. Likewise, when St. Paul in the first two chapters of his first letter to the Corinthians proclaims a divine Wisdom unknown to the Rulers of this world, he is not necessarily under the influence of Jewish gnostic sects. But he does say that the Wisdom of God is hidden and unknown to the Rulers of this world; for if the Rulers had known the hidden purpose of salvation, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory (2.7 f). They were foolish enough to serve God without knowing it. But God in his act of salvation unmasked worldly wisdom as folly (1. 20). And we might also add that the words of St. Paul imply that the wisdom of the Rulers of this world is equally foolish and godless. In the light of the Cross, that wisdom which the angels of the nations supposedly transmitted to the several peoples is shown to be worldly, autonomous, and godless wisdom – it is essentially 'folly' in the Hebrew sense of the word. All this suggests that St. Paul did not think about earthly kings and authorities, but rather about spiritual entities located somewhere in space, the ambivalent spiritual powers behind the earthly authorities. This way of looking at things would seem to be very near to the gnostic dualism of Chokma and Sakla. It is not just a mythological concept of the universe that Paul and the gnostics have in common. It is rather the awareness that the profoundest motives of this world are absurd and that our rational philosophies inspired as they are by these innerworldly motivations are equally absurd – because our world as such is absurd.

But even if Gnosticism and Christianity shared a common Jewish background, there is yet another aspect of their relationship which bears investigation; namely that the Gnostics may have preserved archaic Christian material not attested elsewhere. For a certain period they belonged to the Christian Church (in some congregations longer than in others) and participated in the social, liturgical and sacramental life of the local churches. But by nature the Gnostics were not inclined to have any special appreciation for the massive objectivity of ritual acts. They tended rather to spiritualize exterior rites and thought that it was not only baptism which saved men, but also the Gnosis, "what we are, where we

come from, whither we go." Therefore we have recently learned to appreciate gnostic writings, not only for the specific gnostic doctrine they contain, but also for the traces of primitive archaic theology expressing Christian views in Semitic categories which we find imbedded in the gnostic doctrine itself. Whatever interpretation one finds for these remarkable theological data, he sometimes cannot help but assume that these primitive and undoubtedly Jewish concepts and expressions sometimes lead us back a long way from Gnosticism to Palestinian Christianity, especially where sacramental views are concerned.

On the other hand, the Mandaean problem has become an open question again since Torgny Säve Söderbergh has shown that the Manichaean *Psalms of Thomas* were based upon extant Mandaean hymns, thus proving that the Mandaean sect in Iraq must have had a very long prehistory. Kurt Rudolph argued in his useful monograph on the Mandaeans that this sect was of Western Palestinian origin, and there is much to say in favour of his thesis. The curious expression "Lord of Greatness" in Mandaean writings has been found in the Qumran *Genesis Apocryphon*. Moreover, I cannot explain the parallels between the names of Mandaean divinities and those found in certain Hellenistic magical papyri unless the Mandaeans have very old Western roots. We should also note that in the Mandaean sect ritual ablutions in 'living' streams of water have a central place. The Swedish scholar Segelberg has argued that there exist some curious parallels between the Mandaean and the Roman rite of baptism, and concludes that they had a common pre-Christian background in Palestine. His studies deserve very attentive consideration.

Furthermore Niels Dahl has pointed out that justification in Paul has baptismal implications. Basing himself upon Qumran material he has shown that in the Essene sect the same combination of ablution and justification was found as in St. Paul. "But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6. 11)." It goes without saying that rebirth in the Gospel of John also has its sacramental implications. Now the Gospel of John, more than any other writing of the New Testament, has stylistic and conceptual parallels with Mandaean literature. Even if Mandaeism turns out to be neither so old nor of Palestinian origin, obligatory

reading of Mandaean writings could serve students of the New Testament as good preparation for the right understanding of the Fourth Gospel.

All this tends to show that baptism was very important in primitive Christianity and may have had its prefiguration in the Jewish sects of Palestine.

A primitive survival of sacramental language seems to have been preserved in the *Gospel of Philip*, saying 12.

> One single Name they do not utter in the world, the Name which the Father gave to the Son, which is above all things, which is the Name of the Father. For the Son would not become Father except *he clothe himself with the Name of the Father.*

It has been proven long ago that the speculations about Jesus as the Name of the Father, so frequent in documents of Valentinian Gnosis, presuppose esoteric Jewish lore about the Name of the Lord and have parallels in New Testament passages, especially John 17. 11 ("keep them in Thy name which Thou hast given me") and Philippians 2. 9 ("bestowed on him the Name which is above every name"). Here the Gnostics have a common background with John and Paul, a background which is Jewish or even Jewish Christian. But the curious expression "to clothe oneself with the Name" needs further clarification. There is a parallel for it in another source of Valentinian Gnosis, a sacramental formula quoted by Irenaeus 1. 21. 3, "The hidden Name with which Jesus the Nazarene invested himself . . ." It is possible that these words contain an allusion to the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, for the Valentinians thought that at that moment the Name of God had descended upon Jesus (*Excerpta ex Theodoto* 22. 6). The same expression occurs in the *Odes of Solomon* which I consider to be evidence for Syrian Christianity in Edessa.

> *Put on*, therefore, *the Name* of the Most High and know Him:
> and you shall cross without danger,
> while the rivers shall be subject to you (39. 8).

If we assume that Christianity in Edessa was of Palestinian origin, there is some possibility that the concept of the believer 'putting on the Name' is of Jewish Christian origin. In any case we also find the theology of the Name elsewhere in Syria.

In the *Acts of Thomas* (ch. 27) "the holy Name of Christ which is above every name" is invoked in a sacramental content. The "true Name", i.e. *tetragrammaton*, is distinguished from the conventional name 'Jesus Christ'. "Thou art not able to hear his true Name now at this time, but the name that is given to him is Jesus the Messiah (ch. 163)." If we find the same curious expression in the Syrian Christianity of Edessa and in circles of Valentinian Gnostics somewhere in the West, this seems to point to a common background in Jewish Christianity.

As far as I know, the expression 'to put on the Name' is not found in the Old Testament. But we find there a similar conception, that namely the Spirit of God "invests" man, so that he is "clad" with the Spirit (cf. LXX Judges 6. 34 ms A; 1 Chron. 12. 19; 2 Chron. 24. 20). In a magical Jewish writing of later date, "describing a highly ceremonious rite in which the magician impregnates himself, as it were, with the great Name of God – i.e. performs a symbolic act by clothing himself in a garment into whose texture the Name has been woven," it is said

> Then go into the water up to your loins and *put on* the glorious and terrible Name in the midst of the water.
> Sēfer Hammalbush, Br. Mus. 752.

From this passage we may conclude that the idiomatic Hebrew phrase for "putting on the Name" was 'labuš aet hašēm'.

The same expression was current among the Samaritans. In a Samaritan hymn it is said about Moses

> Mighty is the great prophet,
> who *clad* himself *in the Name* of the Godhead.
> Cowley, *The Samaritan Liturgy*, I, p. 54.

I think this material is relevant for the interpretation of St. Paul's remark, "As many of you as were baptised into Christ, have *put on* Christ (Gal. 3. 27)." The wording seems to be thoroughly Jewish. It reveals to us the Jewish perspective of St. Paul's sacramental convictions. It also leaves open the possibility that this

drastic imagery was not personally invented by St. Paul, but was inherited by him from a common faith and even perhaps prefigured in some pre-Christian sect of Jewish baptists.

Gnostic materials, then, can be instrumental in our discerning the sacramental implications and Jewish presuppositions of some New Testament authors, if only we admit that the Mandaean problem, and more generally the history of Jewish sects, have to be taken into account.

The most important Jewish contribution, however, both to Gnosticism and to early Christianity, seems to have come from esoteric circles in the heart of Palestinian Judaism. Gershom Scholem has shown that there existed within Judaism esoteric traditions which had very old roots and went back to Pharisaic circles of the first century A.D. And he has pointed out that St. Paul as well as some Gnostics must have known these traditions. I accept his view. The Valentinian Gnostic Marcus the Magician, who gives us a phantastic description of the "body of Truth", is indebted to Jewish esoteric traditions about the measuring of the body of the Schechina. When the *Pistis Sophia* mentions a *Jahwe qatōn* and a *Jahwe gadōl*, this writing reveals a familiarity with the shocking terminology of earlier Jewish mystics. We must add that the speculations in the Valentinian *Gospel of Truth* about Christ as the 'proper Name' of the hidden God must have the same origin. For in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* (ch. 10), the oldest document of Jewish mysticism, we find that Jaoel, the vicegerent of God second only to God himself, has received the ineffable Name that is dwelling in him. Speculations on the Name, moreover, were characteristic of esoteric Jewish lore. I think I can mention a new argument in favour of the thesis that Jewish esoteric teaching concerning the *kabōd* as the 'form like the appearance of a Man' or the 'body of God' influenced Gnostic thought. It is taken from the *Treatise on the Three Natures*, the fourth book of the Jung Codex, where it is said of Christ that

> He alone is truly worthy, the *Man* of the Father, . . .
> . . . . . the *form* of the formless, (the *body*) of the bodiless, the *face* of the invisible, the *word* of the inutterable, the *thought* of the unthinkable.
>
> (p. 66, 1. 10–16)

We see then that the Gnostics have been influenced by a very specific current within Judaism, namely the esoteric traditions of Palestinian Pharisees. This should stop once and for all the idle talk of dogmatic minds about Gnosticism having nothing in common with Judaism proper. On the other hand the comparison shows how far the Gnostics have removed themselves from these Jewish origins. The Gnostics teach the consubstantiality of God and man; the Jewish mystics underline the gulf that separates man from God, even in the ecstasy of vision. The Jewish mystics know of no split within the Deity, nor do they admit that the creator of the world is a lower demiurge.

Early Christianity, too, seems to have been influenced by these esoteric traditions. In his book *Jewish Gnosticism* Scholem proves that St. Paul is expressing himself in the terminology of the rabbinic ecstatics, when he says that he has been lifted up towards the Paradise in the third heaven (2 Cor. 12. 2). It is certainly reasonable to suppose that a former Pharisee knew the traditions of esoteric Pharisaism.

This perspective might also throw a new light on other passages of the New Testament. On this occasion I will only remark that the Western text of Luke 11. 52 (paralleled by logion 36 of the *Gospel of Thomas*) shows an awareness of this secret tradition when it states that the teachers of the Law, especially the Pharisees, have *hidden* the key of knowledge, that, is the oral interpretation of the Law.

But also the Gospel of John can become more understandable in the light of these traditions. The attention of the Jewish mystics was focused upon such chapters as Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1 where the prophets described the manifestation of God upon his throne. The mystics were concerned to behold this *kabōd*, this 'body' or 'form like the appearance of a Man'. Is it not remarkable, then, that in the fourth Gospel Jesus reproaches the Jews that they have not seen the *eidos* of God (John 5. 34), implying that God has a form?

Elsewhere (12. 41) John states that Isaiah beheld the glory of Christ. This could be interpreted to mean that the prophet beheld Christ eternal upon the Throne; in that case Christ is identified with the *kabōd* which, according to the mystics, manifests itself upon the throne. This is not only a matter of parallels and historical

influences. It reveals a deep affinity with the basic motives of Jewish mysticism, a common conception of God and a similar answer to the challenge of a particular historical situation. Again it is Gershom Scholem who proves to be a trustworthy guide and an eye-opener on our way. His book *Von der mystischen Gestalt der Gottheit* contains a learned discussion of the problem of the image in monotheism. The latter opposes the use of images in the cult. But this does not imply that God has no form. The Bible explicitly states that God has a 'form' (Num. 12. 8) and is full of anthropomorphic imagery. Under the influence of Greek philosophy, Hellenistic Judaism tried to spiritualize these conceptions and to assimilate them into the abstract generalizations of a rational world civilization.

Completely the opposite reaction to philosophy is to be found in the Palestinian circles which brought forth Jewish mysticism. In these conservative, even reactionary, quarters it is stressed that God has a 'form'. Anthropomorphism is reasserted in a challenging and provocative way. Such bold symbolic speech naturally leads to the break-through of authentic mythological patterns – and this did not happen at the outskirts of Judaism, but in the centre of Palestinian Judaism. Such a Gnosis is completely Jewish-orthodox. Its aim is to maintain that the God of Israel is not an unmoved first mover, but a hidden God who reveals Himself to man. This basic issue of the biblical religion is formulated in a radical way. The astonishing imagery serves a thoroughly conservative purpose, the preservation of the Jewish identity.

Against this background we see more clearly how Jewish early Christianity was. It was part of that movement of the "revolt of the images" on Palestinian soil, already reflected in Jewish apocalypticism and continued in esoteric Pharisaism, the eventual result of which was the birth of Gnosticism proper, at the fringe of Judaism. We may consider this movement as an endeavor in the face of the Hellenistic world civilization to maintain the faith in a living God who is moved and reveals himself. At the same time it represents a swing within the Jewish soul away from reason and moralism towards freedom and the image.

In Christianity, in contradistinction to Gnosticism, man remains man, God is moved but not split, and the redeemer is also the creator. In spite of this, we must conclude that Gnosticism and

Christianity have much in common, because they have in part a common background and a certain historic affinity for one another. Therefore careful consideration of the Gnostic materials can help us to discern how Jewish the New Testament is and how lively was the Jewish mind at all times – especially at the beginning of our era. So much so that both Judaism and Christianity would not only contrast the folly of this world with a transcendant Wisdom which lies beyond our grasp, but would stress the sacramental implications of salvation and the possibility of beholding the glory of the hidden Lord.

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